LIBRARIES AND DIGITAL GOVERNMENT
Collaborating to build digital citizenship

The context: governing in a digital environment

As government services move online, citizens are required to exercise their rights and responsibilities in the digital environment. By 2020, it is anticipated that 80 per cent of Australian Government service interactions will take place online.[1]

Citizens are already channelled online to access federal government services such as:
- Centrelink
- Medicare
- Australian Taxation Office
- Australian Job Search
- National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Many state and local government services have also moved their services online. Increasingly, when interacting with all levels of government, citizens are expected to pay *online*, book o*nline*, complete a form *online*, request a service *online* and participate in public decision-making *online*.

The issue: there are complex barriers to accessing digital government

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2017 found there is inequitable digital access, digital affordability and digital ability across the nation. One in five Australians accesses the internet solely through a mobile device and experiences a high degree of digital exclusion.

People in country areas experience more digital disadvantage than those living in the capital cities, and people living with disability, Indigenous Australians, seniors, low income earners, unemployed and school-leavers have the most barriers to digital services. [2]

Governments want to provide quality services in the digital environment, and understand that people need to achieve practical outcomes in their interactions with government. While the internet has transformed our lives, even with access to technology, not everyone can fully participate. Libraries support people to access and apply the information they need for personal and community development. [3]

How libraries play a role in digital government

Libraries are at the heart of the educational, cultural and creative life of the community. They are inclusive spaces open to everyone. People interact with libraries online and in person so they can access, use and share global knowledge and ideas. They come to libraries to learn, to read, to ask for help, to access technology and to spend time in the shared public spaces.

Australia has a distributed network of more than 1600 libraries across the nation with free public access to technology and the internet. Libraries have always provided access to government information and services, and they will continue to do so in the digital world. They are the natural place for people to come when they need to interact with digital government.

All levels of government rely on libraries to help people successfully navigate public services. People turn to libraries for free, non-judgemental assistance. Libraries:
- address digital disadvantage through one-to-one support and learning programs
- assist with information-seeking, general literacy and lifelong learning
- provide access to computers and internet connectivity.

Partnerships between government and libraries will enhance this existing relationship and reduce the impact of the digital divide in the community. Libraries are the new 'town square', a non-commercial, inclusive place where people come together, find out what's happening in their community and government, and become involved in the democratic process. [4] Libraries are integral and critical to the development of effective digital citizenship and participatory democracy.

Under the digital transformation agenda, government services will move online and continually change. Libraries can be key resources for developing and delivering these digital government services, and library staff – experienced information specialists – can play an important role in user support. However, there are currently no funding arrangements that recognise the ways libraries contribute to the delivery of government services.

1. National Information and Communications Technology Australia, *New models for digital government: the role of service brokers in driving innovation*, 2014.
2. Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, C, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, Tucker, J & Rennie, E, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index* 2017, RMIT University, Melbourne, for Telstra, 2017.
3. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, *Statement on Digital Literacy (18 August 2017)*, https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11586
4. Australian Public Library Alliance and Australian Library and Information Association, *Guidelines, standards and outcome measures for Australian public libraries*, 2016, p. 79.

Building a national response

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) is the collaboration of the national, state and territory libraries of Australia. Our libraries work together to share solutions, build influence, develop expertise and deliver more value for the people of Australia.

NSLA libraries are the major public research libraries in their nation, state or territory. Each has a unique formal relationship with the highly valued public library network in their jurisdiction but all are deeply engaged in developing strong and effective services across their nation.

NSLA shares the vision of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals for 'a world with universal literacy' and supports the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's statement that libraries provide essential services by:

- closing gaps in access to information, and helping government, civil society and business to better understand local information needs
- providing a network of sites for delivery of government programs and services
- advancing digital inclusion through access to information and communication technology (ICT).

A strategy for change

As citizens are forced online and have no other options for interacting with government, they turn to libraries for assistance. NSLA has distilled the challenges of digital citizenship and proposes a strategy to drive better outcomes for all Australians.

Dynamic collaboration between government and libraries will enable citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities in an online environment, and fully engage in participatory democracy.

STRATEGY

REDUCE BARRIERS
The barriers between citizens and access to digital government must be reduced.

BUILD CONNECTIONS
Libraries are natural intermediaries between citizens and government; this connection must be enhanced.

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE
Collaborative, timely and sustainable solutions are required to solve complex inclusion issues.

ACTIONS

Libraries and government support citizens to develop skills to confidently engage with digital government.

Libraries provide local access to technology and face-to-face support.

Government and libraries collaborate to provide effective services that identify and respond to community need.

Government leverages community trust in libraries to encourage open engagement with government.

Government recognises and utilises the distributed network of public libraries to reach citizens across the country.

Libraries and government partner with other service providers to support digital skills development and understanding.

Government provides targeted resourcing to libraries to support programs that help citizens engage with digital government.

Libraries continuously improve support for citizens engaging with government online.

Libraries and government actively communicate about the effectiveness of digital government services.

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